

March 24, 2014

FACT SHEET: Belgium Highly Enriched Uranium and Plutonium Removals

Belgium has been a global leader in nonproliferation, working with the United States since 2006 to minimize highly enriched uranium (HEU) and plutonium inventories in Belgium through the return of a significant amount of HEU and plutonium to the United States.

At the 2014 Nuclear Security Summit, the United States and Belgium announced the successful removal of all excess fresh HEU and plutonium from Belgium. This shipment was completed via a joint effort between the Department of Energy/National Nuclear Security Administration's Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI) and Belgium's Studiecentrum voor Kernenergie - Centre d'Étude de l'énergie Nucléaire (SCK-CEN). This is the third shipment of material from Belgium to the United States under this program.

At the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit, Belgium and the United States pledged to work together to remove this material prior to the 2014 Nuclear Security Summit. The material supported research and development activities in Belgium and was located at two sites - the SCK-CEN facilities in Mol and the European Joint Research Center Institute for Reference Materials and Measurements (IRMM) in Geel. Prior to removal, the material was securely stored under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. In order to complete this project, GTRI and SCK-CEN needed to overcome significant technical challenges to address materials in unique and unusual forms including:

- Development of a new glovebox facility for plutonium packaging;
- Training and certification of personnel in specialized packaging operations; and
- Validation of certificates for a U.S. - designed nuclear material package in Belgium.

Despite the significant technical challenges, the team was able to successfully complete the operation on schedule. Other significant contributors included Belgium's nuclear regulator (FANC), which ensured the material was processed and packaged to allow for safe transport; Belgium's Ministries of Interior and Economy, which ensured the security of the shipment while in transport in Belgium; and the UK's International Nuclear Services, which provided for the secure transport of the material from Belgium to the United States.

This material will be stored at secure facilities in the United States until it is disposed of or downblended to Low Enriched Uranium (LEU) and utilized for civilian purposes. The United States and Belgium plan to continue to work together to eliminate additional stocks of special nuclear material to make sure they never fall into the hands of terrorists, and are prepared to help other countries do the same.

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